General Service Board Meeting

The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc. held its quarterly meeting at the Crowne Plaza Times Square Hotel, New York, NY on Monday, July 30, 2018.

Michele Grinberg, chair of the General Service Board, presided and warmly welcomed all present.

All committees met during the weekend and highlights of committee reports appear below:

Archives


Conference

Work on the Conference Final Report is underway and the bound copy and anonymity-protected digital versions are due in September. The committee requested that the staff secretary send a notice to the chair of the General Service Board asking that each trustees’ committee chair and staff secretary have a call with the members of the corresponding Conference committee prior to the January Board meeting. A subcommittee was appointed to consider delegate review of agenda items that were not forwarded to a Conference committee.

The general manager reported that a poll of all Conference members was conducted to change the dates for the 69th General Service Conference to May 19-25, 2019.

Cooperation with the Professional Community/Treatment and Accessibilities

Cooperation with the Professional Community: A verbal progress report was presented on the development of a LinkedIn page and the committee agreed to move forward slowly and mindfully. The committee agreed to discuss how to best carry the message to those coming to A.A. through court referrals and how to keep court professionals and community corrections professionals informed about what A.A. is and is not.

Treatment and Accessibilities: The committee considered development of a Remote Communities kit. A subcommittee was appointed to identify additional projects to improve the effectiveness of carrying the A.A. message and improve cooperation with the Armed Services.

Corrections

The committee discussed several ways A.A. materials could be utilized in juvenile facilities and requested shared experience from local corrections committees about successes, challenges and literature utilized in juvenile facilities.

Finance

The chair noted that as of June 30, 2018, the Defined Benefit Plan had assets of $35,000,787 and the Postretirement Medical Plan had assets of $5,655,271.

The chair reviewed the change in independent auditing firm from Owen J. Flanagan to Marks Paneth, effective January 1, 2018, and its impact on our financial reporting.

G.S.O. Financial Results

The committee reviewed G.S.O. financial results for the first six months of 2018.

Gross Sales for the first six months of 2018 of $7,212,242 were $106,104 (1.5%) less than budgeted and $101,146 (1.4%) lower than 2017. Gross Profit from literature was $4,792,560 and represented a 67.4% Gross Profit Percentage, compared with 69.6% for 2017. The budgeted Gross Profit percentage was 67.4%.

Contributions for 2018 of $3,816,472 were $138,742 (3.8%) greater than budgeted and $44,802 (1.2%) greater than 2017 actual.

Total Revenue (gross profit from literature plus contributions) was $8,609,032 or $77,634 (.9%) greater than budgeted, but $179,154 (2.0%) lower than 2017. Total expenses for the six months of 2018 were $8,749,575. This is $226,647 (2.7%) greater than budgeted and $928,265 (11.9%) greater than 2017.

The combination of revenues and expenses resulted in G.S.O. reporting a loss of $140,543 for the first six months of 2018. This loss compares to a budgeted profit of $8,470 and a profit of $966,876 in 2017.

General Service Board support of the La Viña service activity was $68,230 compared with a budgeted amount of $72,904 and an actual of $62,494 in 2017.

Grapevine Financial Results

For the first six months of 2018, average paid circulation of the Grapevine magazine was 67,427. This compared with a budget of 63,819 and 2017 actual of 70,238. Online and GV Subscription app circulation was 5,608 in 2018 versus a budget of 4,729 and actual of 6,049 in 2017.

Gross profit on the magazine of $676,466 was $56,219 more than budgeted. Gross profit on other content-related materials of $247,948 was $12,904 greater than budgeted and $20,494 more than 2017. Total gross profit for the six months
was $924,414 and $69,123 more than budgeted and $39,865 less than the $964,279 achieved in 2017.

Total costs and expenses of the magazine for the year were $889,296, which were $131,999 less than budgeted and $25,891 lower than 2017. After adding interest earned, there was a net profit for the first six months of 2018 of $45,118 compared with a net profit of $47,992 in 2017 and a budgeted net loss of $156,003 for 2018.

**La Viña Results**

For the six months ended June 30, 2018, average paid subscriptions for La Viña were 9,643 versus 9,484 budgeted and 9,904 actual for 2017. Income from magazine sales during 2018 was $61,739, compared with a budget of $55,959. Other publishing income added $10,788 to the revenue stream. After deducting direct costs of $29,274 and expenses of $111,483, a shortfall between revenue and expenses of $68,230 resulted for this service activity. This compares with a budgeted shortfall of $72,904 for 2018 and a shortfall of $62,493 for 2017. The shortfall for the La Viña service activity is funded by a transfer from the General Fund of the G.S.B.

**Reserve Fund**

At June 30, 2018, the Reserve Fund had a balance of $15,848,371, which reflected the $1,400,000 contribution from G.S.O. made in early 2018 that resulted from 2017 net income. The Fund represents approximately 10.4 months of 2018 combined budgeted operating expenses.

**General Sharing Session**

The topic of the Third Quarterly General Sharing Session was “Love and Tolerance of Others Is Our Code — Philosophy or Practice?” Pacific Regional trustee Kathi F. presented on the subtopic “Making the Doors Wider in A.A.” and G.S.O. Staff member Clement C. presented on the subtopic “Are We Inclusive?”

Kathi shared “I was part of a very active and large home group that met seven days a week and had a very wide mixture of folks in terms of age, religion, culture and race. It seemed the most welcoming group you could possibly find. One day a young lady at her first meeting was asked to read ‘How It Works’ and introduced herself as an addict. A man with over 30 years stood up and publicly told her she did not belong in A.A. and stormed out. Fortunately, others in the meeting spoke with her and gave her the opportunity to find out for herself if she was an alcoholic. Well, she is and has been an active member ever since.”

Kathi closed with the suggestion “Even though our doors are wide open, we must ask ourselves who is not here and why, finding out how they would like to be approached and fitting ourselves to be of service to those who are still suffering.”

G.S.O. Staff member Clement C. posed the question “Are We Inclusive?” On a personal note, Clement shared “I was in the first wave of students to integrate schools in the Midwest and suffered racism in all its destructive forms. As a result of my experiences, I became determined to dedicate my life to social change. Thirty years later I found myself angry at the entire world and unable to stop drinking. I was the bankrupt idealist mentioned in our basic text. Alcohol had dissolved all my higher aspirations.

“I finally got sober after bouncing around in A.A. for seven years. A member of an all-white A.A. group carried the message into a state-run treatment center where I was once again trying to change my life....

“A lot has occurred in terms of racial diversity in the four years I’ve been a member of staff. I’m very happy to report that in terms of racial diversity our current alcoholic staff at G.S.O. is the most racially diverse in the history of the General Service Office. Likewise, there were records set in the last two years for African-American delegates at the General Service Conference....

“Unfortunately, in my travels around the United States and Canada, I see very little diversity,” said Clement.

He went on to ask, “How can we immediately address diversity in an ongoing fashion?” He offered some suggestions:

- Create ongoing columns in the Grapevine, Box 4-5-9 and About A.A. which could provide a platform for discussions about diversity throughout the Fellowship.
- Revise our pamphlet, “A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic” (which hasn’t been revised since its creation in 2001) to reflect updated experience and format.
- Offer a standing topic at Regional Forums and International Convention workshops on inclusiveness to provide A.A. members the opportunity to share on these issues.
- Expand our focus on underserved communities to include those with physical, ethnic, religious, geographic, racial, gender-identification and any other differences that may have caused difficulty in accessing the A.A. message.
- And, at the bottom of the triangle, make sure diversity is a consideration in the selection of our trustees, nontrustee directors and A.C.M.s.

After the presentations, moderator Newton P invited all in attendance to share on the theme and subtopics. The following includes some of the sharing from attendees.

A nontrustee director (who identified his gender pronouns as he/him) acknowledged that he, as a white cisgender male, has privilege both in society and within A.A., noting that in accepting the reality of that privilege, it is important to use it in efforts to serve those both on their way and within A.A.

A Class A trustee shared that at one of his first local A.A. events, after being introduced as both a Class A trustee and African American, shared that he overheard two G.S.R.s say “This assembly was okay until that black trustee spoke.” Quite hurt, the Class A trustee shared the experience with a Class B trustee in attendance. The last day of the assembly, the Class B trustee made an announcement noting that such talk would not be tolerated in A.A. With that, the G.S.R.s stepped forward and voluntarily admitted that they had made the comment. The Class A trustee noted that through this experience, the then G.S.R.s are still active members in general service and some of the area’s most vocal advocates of diversity and an all-inclusive Fellowship.

A G.S.O. Staff member began by stating, “We have to be willing to be uncomfortable. I am uncomfortable. As an African-American woman I know what it’s like to arrive on a staff trip and be met with a host surprised to see that I am black. Also, as a paid employee, I have felt that I have to tolerate racism while in other circumstances I might speak up.
Therefore, I have to have an ‘armor’ of protection at times to protect myself from these realities. I hope one day that our boards and Conference reflect diversity in a way that we stop counting how many of a particular grouping are there and instead find diverse participation the norm."

A Class B trustee shared that atheists and agnostics continue to be alienated in the rooms of A.A. by members and current A.A. literature. Though progress has been made, there is still a long way to go to make A.A. recovery literature accessible for atheists and agnostics.

A Class A trustee shared that at a Southwest A.A. event a member was very upset when another member involved in local general service showed up wearing a shirt with the Confederate flag. When the upset member shared with her his frustration with the message the shirt conveyed and his feeling that he no longer would attend that event, she told him, “These are the exact events that we both need to be visible at so that there is representation contrary to that message.”

An A.C.M. expressed concern and frustration that local areas sometimes do not create an environment where people with “Diverse Abilities” have access to the same A.A. materials as other local members. Members such as herself should not have to ask over and over for an accessible A.A. message.

A G.S.O. Staff member shared that her experience as an African-American woman, both within her long-term recovery and working at G.S.O., reminded her that thankfully love and acceptance is not our code, but to keep in mind that love and tolerance is.

An A.C.M. recalled how seeing the title of a pamphlet at one of her early A.A. meetings told her that there is a place for lesbian and gay alcoholics in A.A.

A Class A emeritus trustee shared, “This topic is not uncomfortable... but the responses to the topic are. I know that while there are members here who may want a more inclusive Fellowship, there are those right here in this room who do not feel this way. When I served on the General Service Board this topic was looked at as an ‘outside issue’.”

A nontrustee director acknowledged that through his early upbringing he was brought up with ideas that today he is grateful to say he has grown away from; ideas that brought disunity rather than inclusivity. He is grateful to those who have taught him the language of love and service through the program of recovery. He is grateful for a message of self-progress.

A Class B trustee shared that she had been asked directly at a local event by an A.A. member who is black, what she and the A.A. corporate boards are doing to carry the A.A. message to people of color. She also acknowledged that there is a problem of racism in A.A.

International

The committee reviewed and approved the International A.A. data map, as well as the newly revised service piece “Country-to-Country Sponsorship: Carrying the Message World Wide” and the new service piece “International Literature Fund.”

The board approved a recommendation that delegates to the Twenty-Sixth World Service Meeting be invited to attend the October 31-November 2, 2020 Board Weekend as guests of the General Service Board.

International Conventions/Regional Forums

International Conventions: The 2030 International Convention site inspection team visited Indianapolis, Indiana, and St. Louis, Missouri, the two cities selected as possible sites for A.A.’s 2030 International Convention. The team will make a final recommendation to the committee in October.

Regional Forums: The board approved the request for a Local Forum in 2019, to be hosted by Area 05 Southern California. The committee also discussed how to attract first time attendees to Regional Forums.

Literature

The trustees’ Literature Committee chair appointed sub-committees to: 1) review the pamphlet “Questions and Answers on Sponsorship,” identify where it may be appropriate to insert a section on anonymity, draft suggested language, and report back; 2) work on the development of a pamphlet based on A.A.’s Three Legacies; and 3) continue work on revision of the pamphlet “Young People and A.A.” The committee also discussed the development of a pamphlet for Spanish-speaking women alcoholics in A.A. and determined that a new Appointed Committee Member (preferably bilingual) would be beneficial to the project.

Nominating

The board approved George W., of Louisville, Kentucky, for a one-year term as an Appointed Committee Member on the trustees’ Committee on C.P.C./Treatment and Accessibilities. The committee also discussed an additional committee consideration from the 2018 Conference Committee on Trustees that requested development of procedures for a partial or complete reorganization of the General Service Board, A.A.W.S. or AA Grapevine boards and requested that G.S.O. staff gather relevant information for review.

Public Information

The committee asked that language be developed for the pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity” reflecting that A.A.’s anonymity Traditions are not a cloak protecting criminal or inappropriate behavior and that calling the proper authorities does not go against any A.A. Traditions. The board approved that a professional analysis of the Membership Survey methodology be conducted by an outside consultant at a cost not to exceed $8,000.

Trustees Planning and Sharing Session

The trustees met in a special session on Friday, July 27 with G.S.O. Staff, the Ad-Hoc Audit subcommittee, the in-house Core team and Impact Collaborative to discuss the report of the Communications Audit. The board met again on Sunday to review the report and its recommendations.

A.A. World Services

Since its March 2018 meeting, the A.A. World Services Corporate Board has met four times: April 26, April 28, June 15 and July 26. During this same period, the A.A.W.S. Nominating, Finance, Publishing, Technology/Communication/ Services and Internal Audit committees each met twice. Additionally, the A.A.W.S. and AA Grapevine boards met in an informal joint session on April 24, 2018.
Services

Communication Services: The A.A.W.S. YouTube video copyright notices, the custom URL and the About Us page have all been implemented on the YouTube channel and subscriptions have increased to over 1,300.

Conference: The lists of Conference Advisory Actions, Committee Considerations and Recommendations/Floor Actions that did not become Advisory Actions were posted to the Conference dashboard in all three languages. The assignment continues looking into making the dashboard more user-friendly.

Cooperation with the Professional Community: Recently, the C.P.C. coordinator staffed a booth at the Urban Ministry Conference, providing literature to clergy members and military chaplains from New York City and Newark. The assignment is preparing the next issue of About A.A. which explores how A.A. is cooperating with professionals to address the rise in alcohol abuse among seniors.

Corrections: The list of inmates now waiting for CCS contacts is down from 149 to 76. In 2018, over 645 requests from incarcerated A.A. members have been answered by outside A.A. members.

Group Services/Loners Internationalists Meeting (LIM): The Group Services coordinator, along with the publishing director and the general manager, had their third of four quarterly conference calls with three intergroup/central office managers to broaden communication between G.S.O. and the Intergroup/Central Office Seminar.

International: Preparations for the 25th World Service Meeting are in high gear. Currently 69 delegates from 43 countries are expected to attend.

Literature: The summer issue of Box 4-5-9 was published, with reporting from the 68th General Service Conference and articles on the Navajo translation of Alcoholics Anonymous, the concept of corporate poverty as it relates to A.A., and some common myths and misconceptions about A.A. featuring sharing from current and former Class A trustees.

Nominating: The Nominating desk has notified delegates and appropriate area committee officers regarding upcoming G.S.B. vacancies to occur following the 2019 General Service Conference.

Public Information: The video PSA “Changes” is in post-production. This will include French and Spanish versions. The young people’s video approved at the 2018 General Service Conference is being added to aa.org.

Regional Forums: The 2018 Western Canada Regional Forum was held in Regina, Saskatchewan, June 6-8 with 235 people in attendance, including 145 first-timers. The Eastern Canada Regional Forum, held in Victoriaville, Quebec, July 20-22, had 284 pre-registrations the week of the forum, including 183 French-speaking members.

Treatment and Accessibilities: The ASL video version of the “Update on ASL Big Book and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Video Project” was produced and distributed to Conference members and accessibility, elder and remote community chairs.

Office Management

Administration: Staff rotation is scheduled for mid-September; training and preparations on the part of Staff members and Staff assistants are underway.

Archives: Since the beginning of the year, Archives staff has responded to over 670 inquiries from the Fellowship and others. Additionally, a project of deciphering and typing up the collection of Dr. Bob’s handwritten letters has been completed. The collection consists of 92 letters written by Dr. Bob, spanning more than a decade, from September 1938 through September 1950.

Human Resources: Following a thorough review of all new policies by management and supervisors, the Employee Handbook is being formatted and copyedited for publication and distribution to A.A.W.S. employees.

Information Technology: New ERP software will replace the existing financial, purchase order and inventory management systems, Fellowship databases, ecommerce sites (i.e., online bookstores), online contributions and some of the assignment databases. A go-live date of February 1, 2019 is anticipated for the new software.

Technology/Communication/Services (TCS)

The TCS Committee reviewed the minutes of G.S.O.’s Website Committee, along with progress reports and updates on G.S.O.’s A.A. website analytics.

The committee discussed the proposed A.A.W.S./G.S.O. app to be launched in conjunction with the new A.A. website, which would include the Meeting Guide, Big Book, Daily Reflections and alert/messaging capabilities.

Progress reports and updates were reviewed regarding the website design project, implementation of the meeting finder, and the YouTube channel.

The board approved proceeding with the implementation of the Meeting Finder component of the A.A.W.S. app, pending General Service Board review.

Publishing

The committee accepted reports from the Publishing Department, highlighting the following information:

Gross sales: June gross sales are slightly below budget with actual gross sales at $961,621, which is a $1,056 or .11% negative variance against budget.

Web sales: Total web sales (A.A.W.S. Online Bookstores) for June stand at $720,058, which accounts for about 76% of total sales for the company. Sales on the B2B online store (primarily Intergroup/Central Offices and other bulk orders) for June are $436,810, and B2C sales (individual customers) stand at $283,247.

Digital books: Total e-book gross sales through June stand at $109,536, with 27,998 units distributed.


Current A.A. literature translation projects are underway in Brazil, Bali, Czech Republic, Denmark, Morocco, Poland and Ukraine. Newly pending, with Chapter Five submissions under review, is the first-ever translation of the Big Book into Kazakh (Kazakhstan) and a retranslation of the Bulgarian Big Book. Two independent Big Book translations in two Quechua languages are in progress.
At the request of Intergroup/Central Office managers and staffs, bar codes are being added to the back covers of our items of literature in all three language versions as they come up for reprint.

"Anonymity in the Digital Age" posters: Print files have been updated and the posters will go into manufacturing, with a flyer announcing their availability to be mailed with the Fall edition of Book 4-5-9.

Language totals: The Big Book is available in 71 languages, which includes the original English plus 70 translations. Navajo is the latest new language completed. There are 22 non-English languages pending (15 new ones and 7 revisions in progress). Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions is currently available in 44 languages; this represents 43 translations plus the original English. Additionally, as the result of an extensive organizing and inventory effort of Native American and First Nations materials on hand in the office and used by the Fellowship, we are able to include languages such as Algonquin, Cree, Inuititut, Micmac and Mohawk in our tally of totals, bringing the count of A.A. languages worldwide up from 92, as reported in 2017, to a current total of 102.

Finance

Unaudited financial results: For details on A.A.W.S. Finance see the report of the trustees’ Finance Committee on page 1 and the summary of unaudited financial results on the last page of this report for the period ended June 30, 2018.

Internal Audit Committee (IAC)

The IAC reported that an RFP (request for proposal) related to the development and performance of an Internal Audit Program of all of A.A.W.S.’s non-financial internal controls was distributed to two firms. The committee also reviewed archival documents regarding the Disaster Recovery Plan.

Additional Activities

Joint Meeting of AA Grapevine and A.A.W.S.: The two boards met informally on April 24 to discuss collaboration and corporate synergies. Some topics covered: ERP implementation; app and website development; G.S.B. Communications Audit update; the disposition of 5K of the First Edition, First Printing Facsimile Alcoholics Anonymous by AA Grapevine; distribution of digital content.

Safety Card: An in-house ad-hoc subcommittee has been reviewing the safety card in light of feedback from the Fellowship. The responses — both pro and con — regarding the usefulness of the card will continue to be evaluated.

DELTA Project: The board discussed an update from the Ad-hoc Committee on Pricing, Distribution and Discounts (known familiarly as the DELTA Project). An impact analysis was requested from G.S.O.’s financial staff before any recommendations are made to the full board regarding discounts, shipping/handling charges and order processing procedures.

International Convention Update: A progress report on planning for the 2020 International Convention in Detroit was provided, noting that the Talley Management Group had made two site visits to Detroit and are planning a third visit in September.

AA Grapevine

The AA Grapevine Board of Directors met four times since the General Service Conference: A new director’s orientation on June 14, 2018, a board meeting on June 15, 2018, a phone conference on June 28, 2018 and a quarterly meeting on July 26, 2018. The Outreach committee met via teleconference on June 29 and July 24. The Nominating and Governance Committee met on July 8. Additionally, the AA Grapevine and A.A.W.S. boards met in an informal joint session on April 24, 2018.

New Director’s Orientation

The Grapevine Board met for a day of orientation on June 14, 2018. The executive editor/publisher and controller gave presentations on existing goals and operations of the corporation. Directors made presentations on the bylaws and charter, fiduciary responsibilities, board best practices, board composition and rotation, as well as the roles and responsibilities of directors.

Board Committees

The Budget and Finance Committee met on June 12, July 12 and July 24. The Outreach Committee met on June 29 and July 24 and discussed ideas for the 2019 outreach effort. The Nominating and Governance Committee met on July 8, discussing: Trustee Résumé forms for 2019-2020; a release form to be used by GV employees and directors when a talk is recorded on any occasion; a review of the corporate bylaws for errors or changes that do not currently apply to AA Grapevine, Inc. The Ad-hoc Strategic Planning Committee met on July 5, 8, 13 and 17.

Board Actions

The Grapevine Board is currently undertaking a three-year Strategic Plan that will incorporate the Fellowship Feedback Project and will work closely with Grapevine’s web vendor and Impact Collaborative.

June 15, 2018: In addition to approving the minutes of the March 10, 2018 board meeting and approving the treasurer’s report on AA Grapevine and La Viña, the board approved the 2019 board meeting schedule.

July 26, 2018: In addition to approving the minutes of the April 26, 2018 meeting, the April 28, 2018 post-Conference meeting, and approving the treasurer’s reports on AA Grapevine and La Viña, the board took the following actions: approved the 2018-2020 Strategic Plan as presented; requested that the Grapevine board chair speak with the chair of A.A.W.S. regarding the possible addition of a statement on the G.S.O. webpage about subscribing to Grapevine and/or La Viña following an online contribution, along with providing additional information on supporting Grapevine in the service pieces F-42 and MG-15, and adding reciprocal links and hyperlinks to the G.S.O. website.

Financial

For details on Finance (Grapevine and La Viña), see the report of the trustees’ Finance Committee on page 1 and the summary of unaudited financial results on the last page of this report for the period ended June 30, 2018.
Requests continue for additional, new sources for digital and print subscription development such as new database lists; Grapevine and La Viña’s current outreach effort, the 2018 Subscription Challenge, recognizes all new subscriptions purchased through December 2018; the La Viña SMS project’s message-sharing has increased La Viña’s digital community to 1,544 members as of June 4; AA GV, Inc. now offers 30 e-books (24 in English, 4 in Spanish and 2 in French); a translation of Emotional Sobriety in French is under consideration by the La Vigne Board; a vendor has been established to produce explainer videos for the YouTube channel; the Spanish language Digital Archive continues in development; the Android app rebuild is underway and the app update for iOS has been completed by Apple.

Editorial Advisory Boards

Grapevine Editorial Report
Recent issues of the Grapevine magazine have included: Bridging the Gap (April 2018); Our Twelve Steps Turn 80 (May 2018); and Sober Travel (June 2018).

La Viña Report
Recent issues of La Viña have included Welcome or Goodbye?: Stories by members about the ways we welcome alcoholics in need (May/June), and AA in Prisons (July/August).

Publishing Update
Recent publications include the book AA in the Military (print and e-book) and Frente a Frente (stories of sponsorship, in Spanish — print and e-book). One Big Tent: Atheist and agnostic AA members share their experience, strength and hope (print and e-book) will be released in September 2018.

Grapevine Web Report
Monthly web traffic is averaging at 32,640 unique visitors and 126,100 page views.

Grapevine Staff Travel
La Viña Anniversary, Philadelphia, PA (June 17); Grapevine Workshop, Fond du Lac, WI (June 22-24); Eastern Canada Regional Forum, Victoriaville, Montreal, Québec (July 20-22).

FINANCIAL DATA: For the six months ended 6/30/18 (All figures pending final C.P.A. audit)

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<th>2018 Actual</th>
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For comments or questions write to: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163